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FICTION SUPPLEMENT

WITH A CONSIDERABLE CHAT ABOUT BOOKS AND AUTHORS

THE INSKIP PRIDE—A STORY OF LOVE THAT WAS THIRTY YEARS IN SOLUTION

Miss Lavinia Inskip, Who Had Slain Thousands in Her Time, at Last Forced to Surrender.

By GEORGE MADDEN MARTIN.

"PROUD as an Inskip!" And there one stopped; the acme of pride had been reached.

When the last of the nskips passed forth from the family mansion to descend by way of a suite of rooms in a private family to two in a second rate boarding house, and then to a single room over a barber's shop, one would have expected the significance of the saying to wane with the Inskip fortunes. But "proud as an Inskip" was still whispered beneath one's breath as Miss Lavinia swept up the aisle of old Christ Church to the family pew.

Though passed into that indefinite period, middle age, her step had not lost the sprightly stateliness, the graceful yet insolent abandon, so significant of her character as a girl; a character entirely given to impulse, yet using its Inskip pride as an impenetrable armor from which to witness the results of its own indifference to consequences. Miss Lavinia's career was a thing of public reminiscence; a thing to be brought up and aired and told of for the astonishment and edification of the present generation; talked of with that keen relish with which things helping to make history are always related.

Of her insolence? They will tell you how, when Richly, that Midas of the North, pressing her for an answer as they stood together at the bow of a great Mississippi steamboat, made mention of his enormous wealth—they will tell you how Miss Inskip, gazing abstractedly into the blue distance, drew from the purse at her belt a banknote, numbering at least three figures. Then, letting the wind catch it from her white fingers and carry it fluttering over the river's yellow expanse, she turned and left old Richly, red with anger, to digest his answer as best he might.

Daring? Another story is of a wretched youth whose adoration was so mixed with fear that, at her command, he meekly descended from his horse, that a fugitive slave might mount in his place; and while she rode on some twenty miles to aid the poor wretch's escape, the young man walked the wooded roadside half the night in mental anguish, dreading to disobey her command to await her return. And be it said, it was not he who finally told of the story. Oh, yes, certainly she owned slaves herself! Her excuse? The fugitive driven from his hiding place by hunger, had appealed to her from the roadside, throwing himself on her mercy.

And for wit, that mask of ugliness, old Colonel Cognac is still known as "Apollinaris Belvidere"—an instance of Miss Lavinia's satire.

Was she beautiful? Ask this generation's fathers. Indeed, it is whispered that not one of our mothers but accepted her lord's heart and hand after those articles had been laid in vain at the feet of Miss Lavinia Inskip. In her time she slew her thousands and her tens of thousands. Tradition says the present owner of the old Inskip mansion, Judge Richard Alexander, whom every Sunday sees in his place at old Christ Church, has never looked at woman since.

This last is one of the stories oftenest told, perhaps because of the opportunity it affords to describe the famous ball at the Inskip mansion. Three thousand dollars in roses on the ball room walls alone, they say; while in the dining room, the center piece of fruits, flowers, and spun sugar mounted to the dangling prisms of the chandelier, and the elaborate supper surrounding it cost as many more thousands.

On that night Richard Alexander, younger then by some thirty years, handsome, poor, fresh from the country, full of faith in everything, Lavinia included, seemed to have been chosen to be her especial victim and diversion. With her eyes she would summon him, that her red lips might mock him. Did he leave her in anger, her handkerchief was dropped at his feet, as if by accident, as she waltzed by; or, catching his moody eye, her sweetest smile would float back, to lure him to her again. Were he her partner—and full half her card was his—it was to dance a single turn, her perfumed hair intoxicatingly near his face, then to tire, that she might bestow the remainder of the dance on some other of her attendant throng, until, between hope and doubt, young Alexander's passionate heart beat beyond control.

It was in the yard—the beautiful old yard about the mansion, where she had led him, the wild south wind blowing her yellow gauzes from her arms, her throat—that he, having torn a thorny length of bloom from a climbing yellow brier, with sudden daring caught its two ends and held it, crown-like, about her head. With insolent consciousness of her beauty, she threw her head back, bringing her mocking, upturned face near to his. Then, seeing the wild look of daring that sprang to his eyes, she laughed lightly and flipped him in the face, with the gloves she held, as one might correct one's dog.

Taunted beyond endurance, they say, he seized her in his arms and kissed her. With a moment's pause, while the Inskip pride gathered its force, she snatched the thorny switch of brier and struck him across the face, not once, but many times—he standing white and motionless, after the first stroke, until her passion spent itself.

After that young Alexander passed out of the social life of the place, and the career of Miss Lavinia Inskip became more than ever celebrated. Stories without number are told of this period of her life. Once, it is said, at an accepted suitor's jealous remonstrances, she slipped his ring from her finger, tossed the costly bauble through the open window, and left the wretched man, metaphorically, to follow. She quarreled with another only a few days from the altar, and distributed the costly trousseau, the talk of the county, among her negro girls. And so they went, all these traditions—all of them telling how she and wealth and wit and beauty and insolent pride were one—she whose all was now within the four walls of a room over a barber's shop.

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Old Christ Church had again come into fashionable favor, and its sittings were in demand; so much had been done for it by the presence of a new and young assistant rector and a surpliced choir. Years had passed since rent had been paid for the Inskip pew, yet no one had thought to question Miss Lavinia's right to sit there. Today her generation was fast thinning out. The old rector was abroad; Miss Lavinia's pew was wanted, and the young assistant, calmly assuming the prerogatives and duties of the sleepy and inert vestry, saw no reason why it should not be taken. There were numerous single sittings vacant, he reasoned, and in a prettily worded note to Miss Lavinia he intimated as much, at the same time neglecting to mention the matter to his vestry.

Did Miss Lavinia ever receive that note? It would have been hard for those to decide who saw her walk into church that next Sunday, her India shawl so adjusted on the sloping shoulders as to make the best display of the old silk dress; her slender hands folded on the faded velvet prayer book, her once auburn hair streaked to a yellow gray, but her eyes as bright as in the days of their insolent youth. With the old stateliness, and just a touch of the old abandon, she walked the length of the aisle, and her strong soprano voice rose in the chant as usual from the cushioned interior of the Inskip pew.

That week it was whispered around that a piece of the Inskip burying ground in the cemetery was offered for sale—that large entrance plot with its famous purple beeches, which in old days boasted such a display of flower beds and shrubbery. Afterwards it came to light that the young rector had called on Miss Lavinia that same week to explain the point, and to request her to resign her pew for a smaller one. Miss Lavinia received his views in silence, made no protest, and he left, apparently sure of her acquiescence. Yet on the following Sunday she took her usual place with an air which those who knew her recognized as Inskipian, and could have interpreted as declaring defiance to the last degree.

That very week the ground in the cemetery was disposed of, and the entire proceeds of the sale were proffered the vestry of Christ Church, in payment of the debt on the Inskip pew, to the unbounded astonishment of that slow going body. Had the young minister known of this transaction, the matter would have ended there; but as it happened, he did not, Miss Inskip not considering him at all in connection with the matter. But in the meantime, regarding his audience with her as final, he had signified in a new and wealthy parishioner that the large rental offered for the pew was accepted, the details of the arrangement to be referred to the vestry at their next meeting.

About this time two contrary versions of the story began to be whispered abroad. On the following Sunday, which happened to be Easter Day, the large congregation felt an apprehensive thrill as Miss Lavinia entered—perhaps intentionally—a little late. It watched her sweep up th long central aisle, it saw her stop as she reached the Inskip pew, filled to the very door with the family of the rich parishioner, happily unconscious of the position they had unwittingly assumed. Here its very pulse seemed to pause with Miss Lavinia. She stopped. Her face was deadly pale. The pews on either hand were filled. She threw her head back; she turned to go.

Then the pulse of the congregation came back with a bound. Judge Alexander—once the young Richard Alexander—had stepped into the aisle as she came down, had met her, was pointing through the open door of his empty pew. She faltered, she raised her glance to his. Could it be tears in an Inskip's eye? Then she shook her head, walked with steady haughtiness down the aisle of old Christ Church and out of its doors.

Overcoat deliberately folded upon arm, silk hat in hand, the judge closed the door of his pew and left also. Throughout the church, here and there, old members rose and silently followed his example. The young rector stumbled, repeated himself, and the Easter service went on.

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Miss Lavinia had gone home on feet that scarcely seemed to touch the pavements, so swift was her stately speed. She had locked herself and her pride behind the narrow door that was her barrier between the things of to-day and the world of yesterday.

Real Valenciennes on cotton, a Grecian urn amid the barber's pomades, pearls on his vulgar wife, were not more out of place than Miss Lavinia in that small room. An epigrammatic acquaintance once said that in her youth she questioned the right of nature to expect the Inskips to draw breath for themselves. Now, she folded the old shawl with careful, almost reverent hands, fearful of the time when it should be worn out. She wrapped the velvet prayer book in a linen cambric handkerchief of cobweb fineness, that its silver clasp might not tarnish. Then, as surges of wounded pride swept over her afresh, Miss Lavinia walked the floor, her thin hands clenched at either side.

"An Inskip expected deference of Heaven itself!" She had laughed when she heard such things, but in her insolent heart she had gloried that there was truth in them. Was not every Inskip taught these things from birth? Had she not imbibed them, and lived up to them, until to her they were part of the plan of creation itself? Had not her childhood's fancies, her girlhood's friendships, her woman's heart, been crushed beneath this Inskip pride? Her woman's heart——

Old as she was, a blush that scorched her soul burned over Miss Lavinia's face. He, whom she had humiliated past forgiveness, for very hatred of the knowledge that her love was won where it might not be given—he, to-day, had witnessed her humiliation, and, hardest of all to endure, had offered her his protection!

There was a knock. She had refused the dinner brought to her room. Could hours have passed? Was it the barber's wife bringing her supper? Miss Lavinia opened the door. It was to receive the tray of food, upon which lay an envelope. And the handwriting upon that envelope she had not forgotten in all these years!

"He had loved her always," said the note. "Would she let him come to her?"

No! All was his to-day that had once been hers. She had followed his career—would the world have believed it behind such icy indifference of manner? She had read of him as the masterful, self contained, successful man of law, and she knew too well that wealth, position, name, her very home, was his; even such of her old servants as were now living served him, and she had nothing but her pride! And in the long night, walking the floor, opening her window to the warm south wind, she hugged it close. It had been parent, lover, child—all that is given woman to love; and it should be her companion until death.

"No," she wrote him at daybreak, "no. Yet she owed him this—would he forgive her for the past?" Here for the moment her heart beat stronger than her pride.

When the letter was gone, she would have recalled it, to erase that last sentence, but it was too late. The barber's wife had taken it on her road to market.

Was this the end? Would he reply? Why should she care? Pride had ended it now—forever. She must get her needle. "He that works not, neither shall he eat"—strange philosophy for an Inskip tongue!

And yet, if indeed it was ended, why should her heart beat so when the barber's wife came to her door that afternoon?

"The judge, he is below, in the parlor behind the shop," the woman explained.

"I cannot see him. Tell him so."

Yet again, grumbling audibly, the barber's wife returned. "He will not go. 'Tell her,' he says, 'tell her I am waiting, and will wait until she comes.'"

"You must insist. I will not come." The woman's face threatened mutiny, for she was not paid for service. Miss Lavinia hesitated, in despair. Her thimble caught her eye—thin, worn, pricked into holes, yet it was gold. She pressed it into the woman's hand. "Explain to him that I will not come—make him go!"

To her door again and still again the woman returned. "He is waiting, he bids me say, and will wait until you come."

The afternoon dragged by. Toward evening the barber's wife rebelled. Something must be done. She had company invited, and her parlor she wanted and must have. So she told Miss Lavinia in no gentle tones. The Inskip pride writhed under such insolence. Was this retribution, coming now, step by step? The woman's angry voice shrilled higher.

Miss Lavinia arose. "Hush," she begged, "he will hear you. I will go down and dismiss him."

White, stately, yet trembling strangely, Miss Lavinia walked through the barber's shop, which smelled more loudly than ever of scented soaps and hair oils, into the little parlor behind.

The old—or was it the young?—Richard Alexander turned. Ah, yes, it is the young Richard, tender, ardent, glowing, though his hair is gray!

She tried to motion him back, but his arms are about her—he had kissed her. Oh, memories of a night so long ago! Oh, youth—oh, love!

The Inskip pride came rushing to her lips; it trembled for utterance, it fell dying into a broken cry. "It has been my pride," she sobbed. "I have always loved you, Richard!"

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The judge brought his wife into church on his arm the first Sunday after they were married. Nor did it seem ostentatious—the rich dress, the silken wrap, the fine accessories; it seemed only as it should be—Miss Lavinia had come into her own again.

The over zealous young minister had been taught the limits of his authority by an aroused and indignant vestry. The silver name plate was restored to the family pew, but Miss Lavinia, no longer an Inskip, sat with the judge. Evidencing that quality which the hymn book attributes to pride, the Inskip family pew remained—empty.

THE ROWERS

By RUDYARD KIPLING.

Since his famous verses caricaturing Russia under the name of Adam Zad—the bear that walked like a man—Rudyard Kipling has created a no more vivid impression on the reading world than in the following poem-criticism on Germany. It was these verses which are said to have been largely the occasion for the recalling of Ambassador Von Holleben from Washington. It is a powerful satire in the distinctive Kipling vein—being a scathing reference to the Anglo-German pact regarding Venezuela

THE banked oars fell an hundred strong,
And backed and threshed and ground,
But bitter was the rowing song
As they brought the war-boat round.

They had no heart for the rally and roar,
That makes the whale-bath smoke---
When the great blades cleave and hold and leave
As one on the racing stroke.

They sang: What reckoning do ye keep,
And steer her by what star,
If we come unscathed from the Southern deep
To be wrecked on a Baltic bar?

Last night ye swore our voyage was done,
But seaward still we go;
And ye tell us of a secret vow
Ye have made with an open foe!

That we must lie off a lightless coast
And haul and back and veer,
At the will of the breed that have wronged us most
For a year and a year and a year!

There was never a shame in Christendie
They laid not to our door—
And ye say we must take the Winter sea
And sail with them once more?

Look South! The gale is scarce o'erpast
That stripped and laid us down,
When we stood forth but they stood fast
And prayed to see us drown.

The dead they mocked are scarcely cold,
Our wounds are bleeding yet—
And ye tell us now that our strength is sold
To help them press for a debt!

'Neath all the flags of all mankind
That use upon the seas,
Was there no other fleet to find
That ye strike hands with these?

Of evil times that men could choose
Or evil fate to fall,
What brooding Judgment let ye loose
To pick the worst of all?

In sight of peace—from the Narrow Seas
O'er half the world to run—
With a cheated crew, to league anew
With the Goth and the shameless Hun!